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From Computers to Cryogenics Stemming the Tide of Tech Transfer

by S.F. Tomajczyk

The Customs Service is involved in a number of lengthy and complicated investigations into conspiracies which, when they become public knowledge, will shake the high-technology industry to its roots. Make no mistake. Our investigators have uncovered wide gaps in America's ability to keep our technology safe from our adversaries.

William von Raab,
U.S. Commissioner of Customs

The chief executive officer of a small computer firm located outside Boston happens to overhear a conversation between the company's order processor and a friend during lunch.

"It's weird," mentions the order processor, sipping a Coke and fingering a half-eaten sandwich. "Who'd ever in their right mind want to have their expansion boards special-packaged with plastic bubble sheets and silica? I mean, sure, if it were going overseas to Europe or something I'd understand—but New York? It's just five hours from here. They're just wasting their money."

He laughs. "Oh well, guess I shouldn't complain too much. After all, I don't have

to do the shipping, and besides, the extra bucks that company is paying will end up in my pocket at the end of the year as a bonus check." He bites into his sandwich while his friend nods silently in agreement.

The CEO gets up abruptly and marches back to his office. Flipping through his Rolodex, he finally finds the number he's looking for and dials it quickly.

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., in a "secured" room on the sixth floor of the U.S. Customs Service building, a phone rings. A special agent, revolver on hip, leans across one of the many computer terminals and answers the phone.

"Operation Exodus Command Center, may I help you?"

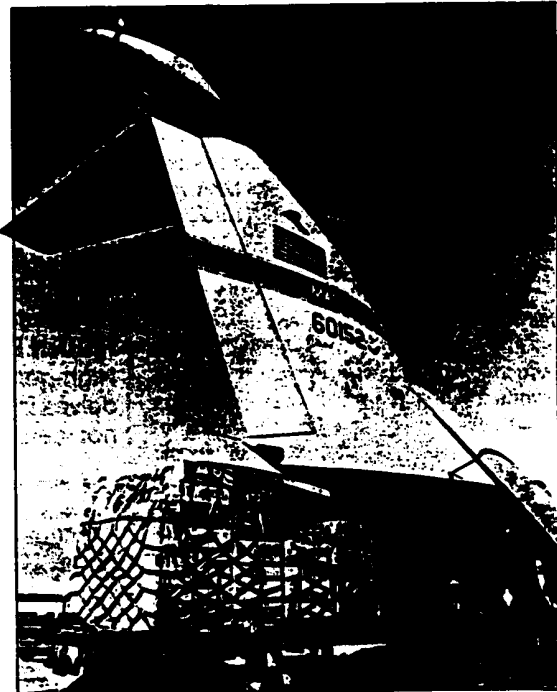
Thus begins the pulling of the plug on technology transfer. The Exodus Command Center sends U.S. Customs agents from the Boston field office to visit the computer firm and exchange the contents of the expansion board shipment with 52 pounds of "Love Me Tender" dog food. Agents then monitor the shipment carefully and trace it throughout its journey to New York.

After days of constant surveillance, U.S. Customs agents finally arrest the "high-tech smuggler" at New York Harbor just eight minutes before a ship destined for Malmo, Sweden, embarks with the so-called "New York-bound" cargo. Both the dog food and the computer components are safe. American technology has again been rescued from one of many high-tech pipelines to the Kremlin.

Scenarios such as the one above are not unusual. Indeed, they occur much more often than most people would like to believe. Technology transfer, or the illegal export of American high-technology know-how,

equipment and strategic material to the USSR and the other nations of the Soviet bloc is a very serious matter in today's high-tech-oriented world. Our national security rests upon our ability to stem the flow of information and equipment to other countries.

Technology transfer is not new. It's been around since some caveman first discovered fire and someone else wanted it without having to go through all the trial and error. But the dangers and implications of tech transfer have been magnified significantly since World War II when high technology was born in the research and



Computer equipment seized by West Germany on behalf of U.S. Customs is unloaded after it was returned to Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, aboard a C-141 military cargo plane. The sensitive cargo was escorted back to the United States by a Special Agent assigned to the U.S. Customs Attache in Bonn, West Germany. Courtesy of U.S. Department of Defense.

S.F. Tomajczyk is a New Hampshire-based freelance writer whose work has appeared in Yankee, Writer's Digest, Metropolitan Detroit, and a number of other magazines. The author would like to thank the following individuals and agencies for their time and information while he was conducting the research for this article: Dr. Stephen D. Bryen, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense; Betty Sprigg, Deputy Chief, Department of Defense; Barbara Ledeen, Counselor, Department of Defense; Chris Frazier, U.S. Customs; Roger Urbanski, Director, U.S. Customs Strategic Investigative Division; Gary Waugh, Chief of U.S. Customs Technology Branch; Senior Special Agent Ed Bryant, U.S. Customs; William Meehan, Chief of Exodus Command Center; the Department of Commerce; the Garn Committee, U.S. Senate; the Office of East-West Trade, Department of State; Ernie Porter, Federal Bureau of Investigation; and computer security consultant Edward F. Savle.

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